

# BEFORE THE HOUSES CAME

THE STORY OF A FARMING FAMILY  
IN THE RURAL PARISH OF BERKSWICH



by

**MARJORIE KNIGHT**  
(nee MALPASS)

## FOREWORD

When Marjorie Knight was a little girl at Walton Farm occasionally she would walk with her parents on a Sunday morning to Matins at Baswich Church. They would take the path down to Milford Road, cross the stile next to the house of the shoemaker, Mr. Price, and cross Giles' Field until they got to the hamlet of Stockton. They would be able to see Stockton Farm in the distance where Marjorie's grand-parents lived. They would then take the footpath beside the hedge bordering the fields of Weeping Cross Farm until they came to Baswich Lane. There were no houses until they came to Yates' Farm beside Holy Trinity Church. At that time there were a number of houses scattered around Weeping Cross - no houses on Hillcroft Park and only Barnfields Farm where the Wildwood pub now stands. The rest was fields.

Mrs. Knight came to the Down Memory Lane mornings organised by Year 10 pupils at Walton High School, Stafford in 1990 and 1991. Like Laura Husselbee in "Down By Jacob's Ladder", Mrs. Knight tells us about life in and around the area, this time in the 20's and 30's. She also covers her school days in Stafford and at Abbots Bromley, her life as a student at Rodbaston College of Agriculture and the early days of Berkswich W.I.

"Have you asked Marjorie Knight?" used to be the question I was asked whenever I spoke to people about the past. I have asked her and in this book she provides the answers.

September 1992

JIM FOLEY  
Youth and Community Tutor

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the following people:

Mrs. Betty Chaddock, who had the mammoth task of typing the manuscript and patiently re-typing sections of it; Mrs. C. Carr of the Reprographics Department at Walton High School for her support;

Bill and Maureen Andrews of Stars Newsagents, Weeping Cross,

Les and Dot Ward of The White House Stores, Milford and the Staff of Wildwood Newsagents, all of whom helped by selling our last book at cost price thus enabling us to produce this book;

Bookland, Stafford;

Mrs. Ethel Best for allowing us to use her lovely poem The Old Farm Gate. It is perhaps appropriate today with plans for a new housing estate of 400 houses and a massive Link Road near Walton.

## The Old Farm Gate

Closed forever - leading nowhere  
A relic of the past;  
The builders left the old gate there  
With rusted chain - held fast!  
He dreams away both night and day  
Remembering times now gone:  
When twice a day cows came his way  
For milking - to and from!

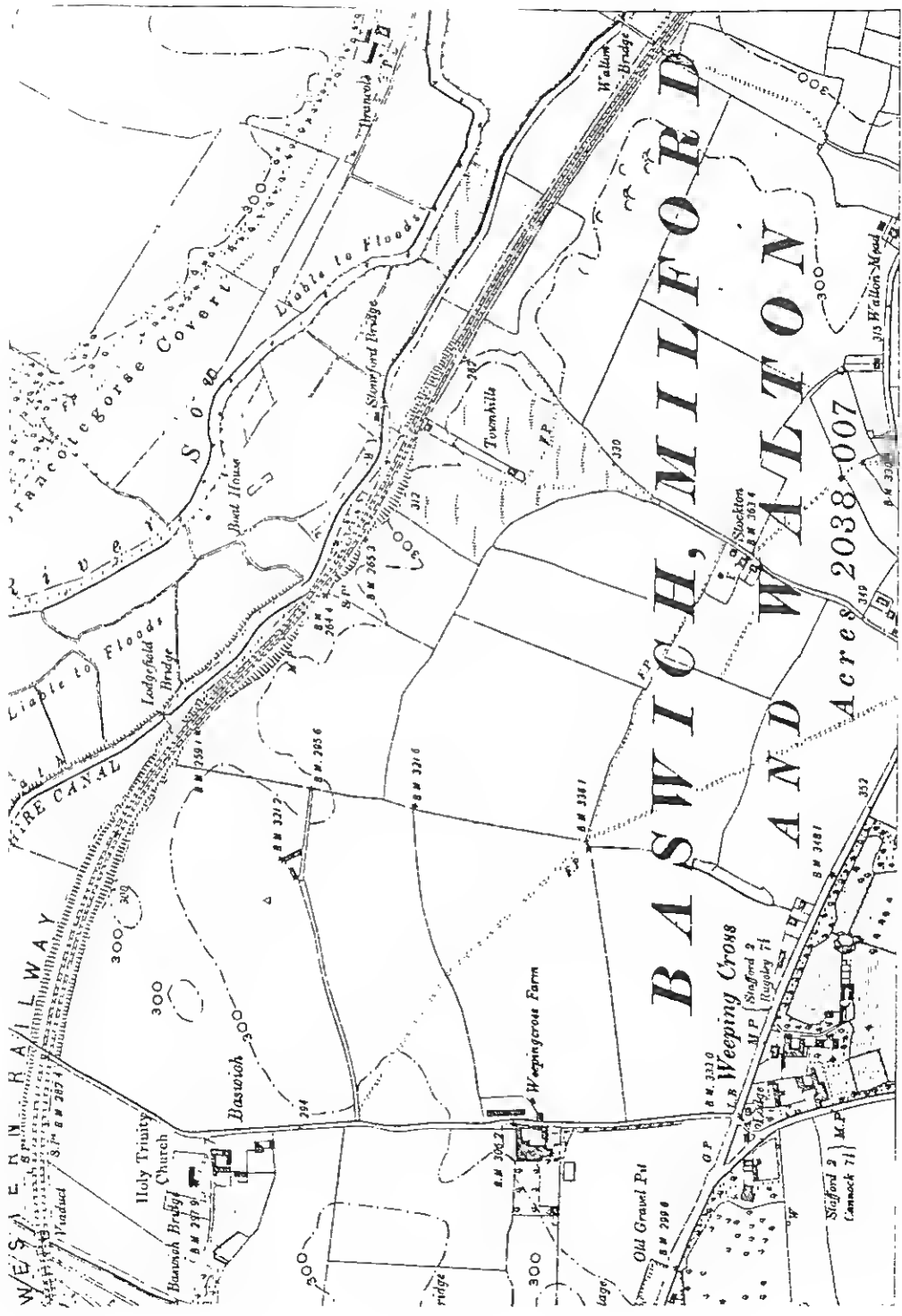
The farmhouse stood just over there  
So cosy and so warm;  
The scent of hay was on the air  
And here a field of corn;  
A long straight row of poplar trees  
Cast shadows in the sun -  
And even now he clearly sees  
The farm hands - every one!

But that was all so long ago  
When Stockton Farm was sold  
For smart new houses in a row  
Which dross and which the gold?  
The old gate stands there with his thoughts  
Weatherworn and crumbling;  
Held up by his stone supports  
With weeds around him tumbling!

He's all that's left of Stockton Farm  
Sometimes in the night  
He hears and sees with some alarm  
An old familiar sight!  
The farmhouse comes to life again  
The lowing herd pass through -  
And life seems briefly just the same  
As once it used to do!

He'll stand there always with his ghosts  
Until his sun has set;  
Supported by his old gate posts  
Until his doom is met;  
But they have told him "Dear old friend  
We will uphold you to the end  
Then YOU can fade into the past  
And join your dear old farm - at last" !

Ethel Best



# BASWICH, MILFORD AND WALTON

Acres 2038.007

The Directory of 1834 describes the township of Berkswich as 1,600 acres of land which included the hamlets of Radford, Weeping Cross, Walton and Milford.

Much of the Parish is rather low-lying, with Radford at one end and Milford at the other, mark the site of old Fords.

Culturally and historically Berkswich is closely linked with Stafford. Farming was the chief industry; salt comes second.

Berkswich and Walton are mentioned in the Domesday Book. From the records it is seen that the high parts were dense forest and the low lands undrained marshland. Radford has records of an ancient Leper House and letters of protection from King Henry III were given to the hospital of the Holy Sepulchre and Edmund Baron Stafford was petitioned to allow Brethren of the Order of the Holy Trinity admittance.

Radford today has a canal and wharf, a garage and the Trumpet Inn.

Walton keeps traces of its antiquity with its Smithy and the old Post Office. The Church of St. Thomas was built in 1842. Walton is fast becoming a suburb of Stafford.

The history of Baswich is all connected with the old Priory, which was a very important Monastery. The Monks used the Church of Holy Trinity for their devotions. When Henry VIII defied the Pope and married Anne Boleyn he gave the Priory of St. Thomas to the Bishop of Lichfield, who, it is assumed, left the Priory and lands to his niece, Ann Lee, who then passed it on to the Fowler family.

In 1716 the last member of the Fowler family died and his Will was disputed and eventually the lands of Baswich were divided between two noble families - the Fitzgeralds and the Falconbergs.

In 1733 the Priory and the lands of the Church were sold by Viscount Falconberg to the famous Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough. This explains why the old pew roll seats were reserved for the Duchess of Marlborough's servants. Finally the lands were sold by the Spencers to the Talbots. Lord Shrewsbury sold his whole estate in about 1961 and most of the farms were bought by the tenants.

The first railway running through the Parish was opened in 1805, about the time of the Battle of Trafalgar. The main railway was opened in 1847, Sir Robert Peel being the guest of honour.

Previously, the Holyhead Coach was the sole means of public transport. However, the rich and titled people still favoured their own horses.

The main road from Stafford to Rugeley and Lichfield ran through Walton Village and was merely a track. The new road past what is now Walton Garage was cut through the fields in about 1850.

The tragic name of Weeping Cross is not unique - there are others in England and said to be a place of execution.

Finally we come to Milford, skirted by a beautiful stretch of Cannock Chase and visited in the summer by thousands of trippers.

Milford Hall is an interesting old mansion and the home of the Levett family.

Two public houses in the Parish mark the site of the old Fords, approximately. The original Trumpet Inn had a grocery shop included in the building and was nearer to the canal.

The first occasion I remember was standing by my Mother at the side gate at Stockton Farm and seeing my Grandmother and Aunt being carried into a Horse Drawn Ambulance. Both were suffering from Diptheria and were taken to the Fever Hospital in Tithe Barn Road. My Aunt told me in later years how they were fed mostly on potatoes. The Matron complained to the Doctor about the food situation. The Doctor replied saying, "Well, give them potatoes and gravy". The Matron then asked him, "How do I provide gravy without any meat?" So one could say that the cure was Isolation, Nursing and Potatoes. The year was 1918. I was 4 years old.

Another incident that I remember to this day. I was playing in the lane at Walton Farm when suddenly the bull's box door opened and out stepped this very large Shorthorn bull. I was terrified and my legs simply froze. Thankfully my Father appeared, and holding my hand, talked the bull back into his loose box. He was really a rather quiet animal, but to a child of 4 years old he looked so large and frightening. After that the door was safely secured on both sides.

In 1910 the Edwards family left the farm at Betley, North Staffordshire where my Grandmother was born and my Grandfather took over the tenancy of Stockton Farm, the property of Captain Levett of Milford Hall.

Mr. & Mrs. Simon Bailey, with their daughter Mary, lived at Stockton Farm from about 1900 to 1910. Mr. Bailey and my Grandfather had been life-long friends, but in 1910 the Baileys moved to a smaller farm at Fradswell, where they lived until the early 1930's, when they finally retired to a bungalow near Stone.

Mr. Bailey's Funeral took place on the same day that my Grandfather died on 28 November 1938.

Mary Bailey married on New Year's Day in 1921 and became Mrs. Gallimore. She now lives at the Old Rectory at Fradswell and must be about 96 years old.

From 1910 - 1956 three of the four farms on the Milford Hall Estate were farmed by members of my family.

My Grandfather was the tenant at Stockton Farm from 1910 until his death in November 1938. My Father was the tenant at Walton Farm from 1915 until he retired in 1946, while my Uncle became the tenant of Weeping Cross Farm in 1925 until about 1956, when the land was sold for building the Wimpey Estate. However, he did not move to Walton Mead until 1960, for Weeping Cross farmhouse, the walled-in garden, orchard and paddock belonged to him. So my Grandfather and my Father and my Uncle made up a tenancy of 90 years on the Milford Hall Estate.

Weeping Cross Farm was a fine old Georgian house with curious outbuildings known as "The Grotto" and a summer-house decorated with shells. The house had three sets of stairs; the main staircase was oak and was really beautiful; the doors to the rooms were of mahogany. From the hall there was a Butler's Pantry and from there you went down about four or five steps to the Kitchen. It was huge - the largest one that I have ever been in. It had a large bay window and a smaller one almost side-by-side and a large range ran the width of the room.

I think beer must have been brewed there for I once saw the handles for drawing the beer in the cellar.

Records show that in the early part of the 19th Century the farm was owned and occupied by a family named Grindley. The son who inherited the property took up the manufacture of pottery and quickly moved away from Baswich, selling his birthplace to a farmer called Stubbs in 1890. The Stubbs family had a local reputation for sociability and their cheerful conviviality.

From about 1913 an Irish Catholic family farmed there until 1925. The farmer was a friend of my parents; his name was William Mailee. He and his wife had three children - Alan, Eileen and Nora - who attended the Convent School in stafford. Their Mother used to collect them in the afternoons in her pony and trap. Sometimes I was lucky enough to get a lift home with them. Mrs. Mailee was very kind to me as a child.



The farmyard at Stockton Farm



Stockton Farm, Stockton Lane, Weeping Cross.



Stockton Lane, 1992

Stockton Farm was a nice roomy old house, oak-beamed, with an ingle-nook in the dining room. It stood on the main road with a nice garden and there was a large malt-house with a malt-kiln and a special floor for drying the grain, which was used for brewing many years before. On the top storey of the malt-house a shooting gallery had been fixed and the young men from the surrounding villages and from Stafford used to come there twice a week to practice and had great fun.

Stockton Lane then was a pretty little country spot with six cottages and a very small general shop, run by 'Mammy Green'. There were about five cottages on Stockton Common and one on the far side of the canal.

On Bank Holidays crowds of people used to pass the farm on their way to the Fair on Milford Common, some on bicycles, but mostly on foot.

One day, while digging out a rabbit on Stockton Common, a bricked fox-earth was discovered which had evidently been made for rearing cubs for hunting.

My Grandmother died on 2 March 1932. My Grandfather died on 28 November 1938. He farmed Stockton Farm right up to the day of his death.

In 1915 my Father took over the tenancy of Walton Farm, the property of Captain Levett. The farmhouse was rather disappointing for it was surrounded by the farm buildings and brick walls. It was a house without a view.

However, there was a marvellous old Barn, very large and lofty, one of the finest for miles around. The corn used to be ricked here and in the old days threshed out by hand. That Barn has now been converted into a house.

The farm was then mostly arable and sheep, but eventually my Father went over to dairy farming, pigs and sheep. My Mother took charge of the poultry.



Cutting the hay "somewhere in Berkshire".

Photograph courtesy Mr. Weaver



Stockton Lane looking south towards Milford Road.  
Photograph courtesy Mr. Weaver



Freda's grave on Cannock Chase

Photo courtesy of Mrs. Jane Freeman



In those days the milking of the herd was done by hand so that meant an early start. The day began at about 5.30 a.m. The cows were milked; the milk was then strained, cooled in the Dairy and put into 17-gallon churns. It was then taken to the Army Camp on the Chase with a pony and float until 1919, when the Camp was closed down.

My Father used to have to wear two overcoats in the winter when making the journey, it was so cold. At about that time I am told there was a bad epidemic of 'flu and many died.

A greyhound dog was the New Zealand Army mascot and was a great favourite with the soldiers. Her name was 'Freda'. However, she died and was buried on the Camp site and was given Army honours and a small headstone was erected which just said, 'Freda'. Unfortunately the picture postcard that we once had showing her grave has been lost.

With the departure of the Army my Father had to find a wholesale dealer who would buy the milk. Usually it was the Midland Counties Dairy or the Co-op in Birmingham.

The milk had to be taken to Milford Station to get the 8.30 a.m. train; again, the journey was made by pony and float.

Milk was sold at Walton, Stockton and the home farms. Usually it was fetched from the farm itself, but some milk was delivered by local boys. Albert Fradley was one of the boys who delivered milk for us. As the village grew, milk floats drawn by ponies were used. Later they were replaced by vans.

The view from the rickyard at Walton Farm at that time was looking across to the Chase and seeing rows of army huts on the skyline. Slowly these huts began to disappear; they were dismantled and erected as bungalows, for soldiers coming home from the War needed homes.



Walton Farm



Top - the barn at Walton Farm  
Below - as it is today





Elizabeth (Edwards) and Harry Malpass on their wedding day, April 9 1913 at Baswich Church.



Marjorie Knight at 18 months



Marjorie Malpass    Peggy Lycett  
Bunny Kelly    1922

on their way home from  
Green Hall School.

There were no buses at all until about 1922 so people from the Village had to walk or cycle into Stafford to shop. Before then I was one of several little girls of 5 years old who had to go to Milford Station to get the train to Stafford. I went in my Father's milk float with Joan and Edna Evans. Alice Ellwood from Brancote and Margaret Smith, the Rector's daughter from Tixall, had to walk at least a mile before boarding the train. These two girls were older and used to look after us little ones and walk us to the Green Hall Preparatory School. They were both very reliable girls and took great care of us.

The hard part came at mid-day, for the two girls stayed all day at the High School and there was no-one to see us safely to the Station and no mid-day train to bring us back to Milford, so we had to walk home. It was uphill for most of the way and it always seemed to be very hot or very cold weather. The walk usually took us about two hours and our legs did ache. There was Bunny Kelly, Peggy Lycett, myself and Ruth Ward, whose Nanny called Farre sometimes came to meet us and to help us on our way.

So you can imagine it was with great joy when a small grey bus started running and we were able to ride to school in comfort. What is more, it brought us back home again for 1½d. each way.

One day I remember passing St. Paul's Church and saw something that I hadn't seen before. It was a Horse Drawn Hearse with two black horses, each one wearing a black plume. So it was evidence that a funeral service was taking place in the Church.

My school days at the Green Hall were happy. Miss Margaret McCrea and Miss Williams, Miss Moncur and Miss Edger taught us. There were four or five classrooms and we began the day with a roll call, followed by Morning Prayers in the entrance hall and ended with the singing of a hymn. There was a White Lodge at the drive entrance and Green Hall had a large and very interesting garden and paddock and shrubbery, which was simply marvellous in which to play 'Hide and Seek'.

Joan Sherratt and Muriel Sampson were my first friends. I also remember Joan Riley, Irene and Marjorie Pointon, Jean Horne, Betty Downs, Kate and Hilda Gosling, Betty Howard, Richard Fisher, Royce Espley and the three Dorman brothers, Maurice, Hilary and Steven. Steven was killed in the 1939 War, and many others.

When I was about 8 years old I joined the Brownies. Miss Allsopp acted as Brown Owl and led the Walton Brownie Pack. The meetings were held on Saturday mornings at Walton Bury. We little girls wore brown dresses with a belt, a yellow tie and a small round straw hat. As we left to go home, Miss Allsopp would take her Brownies into the front hall to say hello to Polly the parrot. Polly usually replied.

At the age of about 10 or 11 years we moved up into the High School where Miss McCrea (Senior) was the head mistress. She was very strict and very stern. One look from her was quite enough to silence a whole class. We used to tremble if we met her in the passage, but she was always fair.

We played netball in the winter and tennis and rounders in the summer.

At about this time Miss Bowles used to be in charge of the School Kitchen and her hot lunches in winter were very welcome. My favourite dishes were Toad in the Hole and a jam or treacle 'rolly-poly'.

There were no houses up Walton Rise until you reached the top, where one small bungalow stood and a delightful house called Walton-on-the-Hill, once owned and lived in by Lady Salt and then Miss Brace. Near to this was and still is, Congreve House, built in 1730 as a farmhouse and opposite the charming black and white house known as the Old Post Office. Next door was the Smithy. Thomas Fletcher was the Blacksmith and worked the forge; many tales were told there. At the age of 90 he still used to be up the fruit trees pruning them himself. He was also the "Pinner". The Pinfold stood opposite the Smithy, where straying cattle were locked in till the owners came for them.

The ground where Walton High School now stands was known as the 14 Acre Field and was part of Stockton Farm. This field was grazed in the winter months and mown twice in the summer for hay.

On the land where the Methodist Church stands there was a pond which sometimes had a pair of swans on it. On the left-hand side was a small, three-cornered field with a stream running through it known as 'Tommy's Meadow', or 'The pony meadow'.

The Gorsty Hill Field was on the right hand side of Brocton Lane. It was 15 acres in size and was part of Walton Farm. It joined the Old Croft, which is now a housing estate known as Walton Heights.

There was a farm gate and a style beside it, for there was a public footpath running along the 'Headland' and near the hedge where stood two lovely oak trees that had seen much progress in the passing years.

This field was not a permanent pasture - a 3 year Rotation plan was used. The first year it was ploughed from the green (or grass) and sown with Oats or Barley. The second year this was repeated. The third year it was ploughed and root crops, such as potatoes, turnips and mangolds, were planted. The following year it was ploughed and sown again with corn and undersown with grass seeds.

What is now Hillcroft Park consisted of several fields which were part of Stockton Farm. The first one nearest to the main road was known as the Front Field. It was a permanent pasture of about 6 acres and was grazed.

I remember it had 3 apple trees in the far hedge which produced very good fruit. The adjoining field was usually planted with potatoes. The next field was alternately planted with root crops, such as turnips, mangolds and swede.

In all there were three fields which were approached by a rough cart track, going up from the main road.

At the end of this cart track you came to a very interesting old brick barn. It had double doors at the front, a sliding door base and a pitched roof. It had a bullock yard adjoining the rear.

The yard was open to the sky in the centre and had a gallery-type surround with hay racks fitted to the walls. This surround gave protection to the cattle in bad weather.

On the right-hand side of the barnyard was a very, very deep well. It was fenced with hurdles for safety of both man and beast. When you threw a large stone down, it seemed ages before you heard a 'plonk'.

I often wonder how the builders dealt with the Well.

The well was somewhere to the right of Radstock Close, Hillcroft Park and might still be there in someone's garden, unknown to them.

At the end of what is now Clevedon Avenue there was a small spinney. It was called Evans' Wood after Rupert Evans, the Auctioneer, who lived in a house near Baswich House. He owned the fields beyond the wood.



Mr. Keeling outside Wisteria Cottage  
Walton Springs is in the background



*Street in the Old Village, Stamford*

In those days of my early childhood I used to visit Mrs. Trundley. She was a widow and had lost her only son, Jim, in the 1914-1918 War. She used to live next door to Mr. & Mrs. Dutton and their daughter, Laura. Mrs. Trundley occasionally used to walk up to Walton Farm, wearing a bonnet and shawl. She used to fascinate me. Mrs. Dutton was such a cheerful, happy person and we children all loved her.

About the same time I began to attend Miss Tagg's Sunday School class which was held in Walton School at 2 p.m. each Sunday. From there we went up to the Church in time for the Children's Service at 3 p.m. taken by the Rev. Hitchings; most of us children attended. If a baby was to be baptised it usually took place at this afternoon Service.

Sometimes, after the Service, in the early summer the Vicar would take us into his garden. He had two very small ponds at the side of his front lawn; they were only, say, a yard in diameter but they contained tadpoles and nearby there was an old bronze cock, about 2 feet in height and now discoloured with age and the weather. I think that it had once graced the Church spire.

Mr. Keeling was the Sexton. There was, and always has been, only one bell at Walton Church. Mr. Keeling had a rather strange way of ringing it, with one foot placed in a loop at the end of the bell rope and then holding on with both hands. It was strange how he kept his balance for he must have been at least 70 years old! Mr. Keeling lived in Wisteria Cottage.

Mr. Keeling had a large vegetable garden. In the summer he sold raspberries and always put them out on a large rhubarb leaf.

I remember he died at 4 o'clock in the afternoon on Maundy Thursday. His niece, Miss Harris, later Mrs. Townsend, came and told us. He died at Wisteria Cottage on 9 April 1925 aged 71 and is buried at Baswich.



Miss Tagg lived in the first semi on the left and next door lived Mr. Bennett. In the distance is the village forge with the Old Post Office behind.



Walton Blacksmith's Shop and The Post Office next door

Opposite him and just up from the village pump resided the two Miss Taggs. Lydia, the elder by some fourteen years, was known to us all as 'Nanny' for she had been a children's nurse for all of her working life. At the age of eight she attended the Betty Dean's School at Milford. She was so small and gentle and died about 1950 at the age of 90. Her sister Alice was a school teacher and was deeply devoted to Walton Church and Brocton Sunday School and all village life, especially the W.I.

Mr. Bennett was the gardener for Mr. Morgan at Walton Lodge. He lived in the cottage adjoining Miss Tagg's. Mr. Northwood was the Head Gardener at Walton Bury and lived in a cottage nearby. Mr. Holford was also employed in the garden at Walton Bury and Mrs. Holford was in charge of the laundry there, while Mr. Clements and Mr. Burden were gardeners for Miss Brace of Walton-on-the-Hill. They lived in two semi-detached houses opposite the Pinfold on the road down to the Church.

Walton Post Office was then at Walton Springs and the Woods family ran it. Mr. Woods, I am told, delivered the letters before the 1914-1918 War. The Post Office later moved to the thatched cottage next to the Smithy when the Woods family moved there.

Mr. Pierce was the postman I remember as a child. He lived then in the Rickyard Cottage, near Milford Hall. He also delivered fresh fish once a week on a hand-cart which he pushed round the village. The fish used to arrive from Milford Station in a very large box direct from Grimsby.

The village shop was next to the School House and was run by Mrs. Pierce.

Mr. George Woods bought one and it was erected where the present Walton Garage now stands. They were made cosy and comfortable and he and his wife lived there for several years. Mr. Woods built up the Garage business and Mrs. Woods had a very small pork and sausage shop on what is now, I suppose, the forecourt. I used to love watching Mrs. Woods making and stringing the sausages. That hut from the camp was still there in 1946.

In those days my Father used to buy a truck of coal from the Littleton Colliery, near Cannock. He had to send two men, two horses and two carts to fetch the coal from the pithead and it usually took the whole day for it was a journey of about eight or nine miles and the going was slow. My Father used to let Mrs. Trundle have a few hundredweights, which used to please her very much and she paid when it was convenient for her to do so.

Around that time Mr. Nicholls of Milford became the Coal Merchant.

Nearly every cottage had a pig-sty, usually with a pig which would be killed in the winter months. A local man used to go round doing this job. The sides of bacon and hams were cured by rubbing salt and saltpetre into the meat, and they would lie on the pantry or cellar slabs for about 6 weeks. When the salt had been absorbed, they were hung up to dry from hooks in the kitchen. Another way of curing was to make up a solution of Beer and Black Treacle, thus giving the bacon and ham a smoked taste.

Colds were treated with cups of hot black currant tea; for sore throats one had to gargle with salt and water and tie one's left stocking round the neck. I understand that goose grease used to be rubbed on the chest 100 years ago and a piece of flannel tied around. The smell must have been quite disgusting.

Church records show that in 1884 the Rev. Francis G. Inge became Vicar of this Parish. He was a bachelor and lived at Walton Vicarage. Mr. Pierce, who lived in the cottage next to the Parish Room, was his coachman.

Several years later the Rev. Inge became friendly with two lady parishioners. It was said to me that one day he walked down to Milford and proposed to one lady, who thanked him but declined his offer of marriage. So he came home again, ate his lunch and walked across the lane and proposed to Judge Spooner's daughter, Catherine, who lived at Walton Lodge. She accepted his offer with pleasure and so they were married. May one say that it was quite something to propose marriage to two different ladies on the same day?

Rev. Inge was said to be a generous man and when visiting a sick parishioner he usually took a small bottle of brandy in his pocket to give to them.

The Rev. James Cappell was his Curate from 1903 - 1910. He was later killed in the 1914-1918 War.

In 1910 the Rev. d'Ombraïn followed Mr. Cappell and lived in one of the Oaks houses in Kitlings Lane.

In 1912 the Rev. and Mrs. Inge left Berkswich after 28 years of faithful service and retired.

In 1912 the Rev. Story Busher became Vicar. He married my parents at Baswich Church in April 1913. They rode in a carriage drawn by a pair of grey horses to and from the Church.

On the eve of the Wedding Day the Vicar gave my Mother a book of devotions. It was called, "The Cloud of Witness", and I have it beside me now.

Mr. Busher's stay here was a short one; however, he did meet his wife here - she was one of the Twigg girls from Weeping Cross House. They married and in 1914 they left, he having accepted the living of Carisbrooke in the Isle of Wight. He remained there for nine years



THE LAST PLOUGH SUNDAY SERVICE AT WALTON CHURCH

JANUARY 1958

L. to R.

Mrs. K. Hudson (Now in her 92nd year) Mrs. Young  
Mr. E. Parker Mr. Young Mr. T. Davies Mr. H.L. Malpass  
Mr. W. Hudson

Rev. Merlin Davies Rev. M. Perry

The Plough

before moving to the Oxford Diocese, where he spent the rest of his active ministry. The Rev. T. Story Busher died in 1963, at the age of 81.

In 1914 the Rev. G. Hitchings succeeded Mr. Busher as Vicar. He was a bachelor and lived at the Vicarage. Miss Pitt was his house-keeper and Dora was the maid. He was Vicar of this Parish for 19 years, leaving in 1933 to become Vicar of Harlaston, near Tamworth. He was deeply upset when he was asked to move for he was very attached to Berkswich.

The Rev. Lawson who replaced him came from Harlaston. In fact, they exchanged livings. The Rev. Lawson had two daughters, Mary and Dorothy. A third daughter, Eleanor, was born the year after he arrived. He stayed until 1941.

In January of 1942 the Rev. J.C. Barry left Bloxwich and came to 'Chad Country' to become Vicar of the Parish of Berkswich. His face was kind and had that spiritual look; he was greatly respected, especially by the farming families in the Parish.

He introduced the Children's Church and I remember a garden Service taking place at Walton Bury, with Betty Thompson (now Lady Terry) and Audrey Mercer reading the lessons.

Mrs. Barry worked hard to get new members and got the Mother's Union on its feet again. She was interested in people and was very motherly.

The Vicar revived the Service of Plough Sunday on about the third Sunday in January when a horse-drawn plough was brought into Church to be blessed for the work it would do in the coming year.

Mr. Barry invited the local farmers to read the lessons and to collect the Offertory.

At the Harvest Festival they were asked to do the same, but this time the farmer's wives were asked to decorate the three Churches with sheaves of corn, flowers, fruit and vegetables. One year we made a small hay-rick. It was properly thatched and had to be secured to a board. This arrangement of the farmer's wives doing the flowers in Church for just one Sunday in the year pleased some, but the usual flower arrangers did not take kindly to the idea at all.

The Vicar also asked our herdsman to ring the Church bell at Walton for Evensong for the Harvest. It was something he was simply delighted to do.

Mr. Barry took great interest in the Gypsies on the Common at Milford; he used to visit the site, talk to them and baptise their babies.

The Rev. and Mrs. Barry stayed with us for only  $6\frac{1}{2}$  years. In the Summer of 1948 the Vicar became ill and we were all very concerned. After the morning Service at Baswich he was so exhausted he would have to go into Baswich Farm where Miss Arblaster would give him a 'drop of Brandy'. He died in March 1949. His remains are buried in the Sanctuary at Walton Church. Dr. Woods, who was then the Bishop of Lichfield, conducted the Memorial service. The bell was rung 66 times - one ring for each year of our late Vicar's life. His remains are buried in the sanctuary at Walton Church.

Records show that in 1893 Mr. & Mrs. Longson arrived at Walton as Headmaster and Headmistress and the school immediately improved. The Longsons were at Walton for over 30 years and were loved and respected by their scholars and they cared deeply for the children in their care. The school was enlarged in 1895.

They had no children of their own, but about 1904 a niece came to live with them, due to the serious illness of her Father. Her name was Marion Eva Macdonald. She never returned home but stayed with her Aunt and Uncle and was to them a much-loved daughter. She was married in June 1925.

I understand that during the First World War school dinners were provided for the children at Walton School. Mrs. Longson, with her girls' cookery class, prepared these meals at the School House. The children paid 10d. a week, the meal consisting of soup or real Irish Stew made with meat, dumplings and vegetables, followed by a good serving of milk pudding. It must have been a pleasure to see those children with their basins enjoying a substantial meal during the scarcity of bread in those days. Many of those children had to walk several miles each day to the school, especially those who came from the Brancote Cottages, but on arrival, if a cold or wet morning, they were provided with dry shoes and stockings and a hot drink of cocoa by Mrs. Longson.

Mr. Longson was in the Walton Church Choir during his stay in the Parish and faithfully attended evensong there. He also used to play the organ at Baswich Church on Sunday mornings for the Service of Matins. This he did for many years, for in those far-off days there were no lamps or light of any kind in the church, and so no Evening Service.

Mr. Longson, usually on Saturdays, would reach for his gun and call his dog and take several of the older boys with him for a day's rabbit shooting. He always had a black, crisp, curly-haired Retriever. By the nature of

their breed they have the instinct to recover fallen game. They are faithful and affectionate animals.

The boys in their last year at school had a gardening lesson one afternoon a week. The school garden was a small plot of ground near Walton Lodge and the boys grew summer vegetables there.

One Christmas it was said that Mrs. Longson had made a 'Gross' of mince pies and had given most of them to friends in need, such was her generosity.

Mr. & Mrs. Longson retired to Llanaber in North Wales in 1927 after 34 years of dedicated service to the school, the Church and the village.

They returned to Milford in 1945 and lived in a bungalow called 'Notlaw' - Walton spelt backwards. Mr. Longson died in November 1948. Mrs. Longson died in February 1950.



Mr. & Mrs. Longson

Mrs. Levett worked hard to get the Berkswich Branch of the Womens Institute formed. She walked round Milford and Walton asking people to become members.

In 1919 Berkswich Branch of the Women's Institute was formed with 25 members. Mrs. Levett was its first President; Miss Tagg was the Secretary and Mrs. Longson, with her very large tea-pot, was the first Hostess. The Meetings each month took place in the Village School in School Lane. My Mother was a founder member and remained so for 59 years until her death in 1978. Her sister was also a member, but only for 13 years, for then she married and left the Parish. The two Miss Blakemans and Mrs. Hamnett walked from Brocton to attend the meetings.

Mrs. Dodd from the Coffee House at Milford was a member. The Hon. Mrs. Allsopp attended and entertained the W.I. to a Summer Meeting in her garden at Walton Bury each year; Miss Allsopp was also a member, as was Mrs. Haszard, who was then Miss Levett.

Mrs. Causer, who was the District Nurse at that time, Mrs. Pointon, Mrs. Cook, Mrs. S. Woods, Miss Birks, Mrs. Dawson, Mrs. Bennett, Mrs. Pitt, Miss Ashton and several others were all members in those early years. Mrs. Husselbee, known then as Laura Dutton, joined the W.I. in 1920, age 17, and was the youngest member. She said only a month ago how much she enjoyed the millinery and the glove classes. They also did rug making, cane-work and cookery. Miss Ball, who lived in a cottage near the Church, was also a member. I remember her so well, for she sold small packets of biscuits for 2d. in her front room and was always so kind.

She had been a Ladies Maid all her working life and so had the courtesy title of Mrs, although she was never married. Her great companion was her dog known to us children as 'Jimmy Ball'.



My Father and Mother and myself  
with Peggy the dog in 1960

Mrs. Levett was very interested in nursing and founded the Tipton Training Home for nurses, which was the first of its kind in the County. She was an enthusiastic gardener, a great reader and great walker.

Mrs. Levett founded the Confraternity of St. George, a religious order for those who wished to dedicate themselves to the service of God without entering religious houses. In her later years she always wore a grey habit; a grey dress with a red cross on the front, together with a grey cloak and a small grey round hat.

I am told that in her early married life she took great interest in politics, being the Chairman for many years of the West Staffordshire Women's Unionist Association. It was said it was largely through the efforts of her Ladies Committee that the late Lord Lloyd was returned to Parliament.

Mrs. Levett was then living at Chapel Leasowes, in the wood. She died early in March 1947, aged 81, just thirty years after her only son, Lieut. R.B. Levett was killed in action on the Somme on 10 March 1917.

The internment took place in Walton Churchyard in the snow.



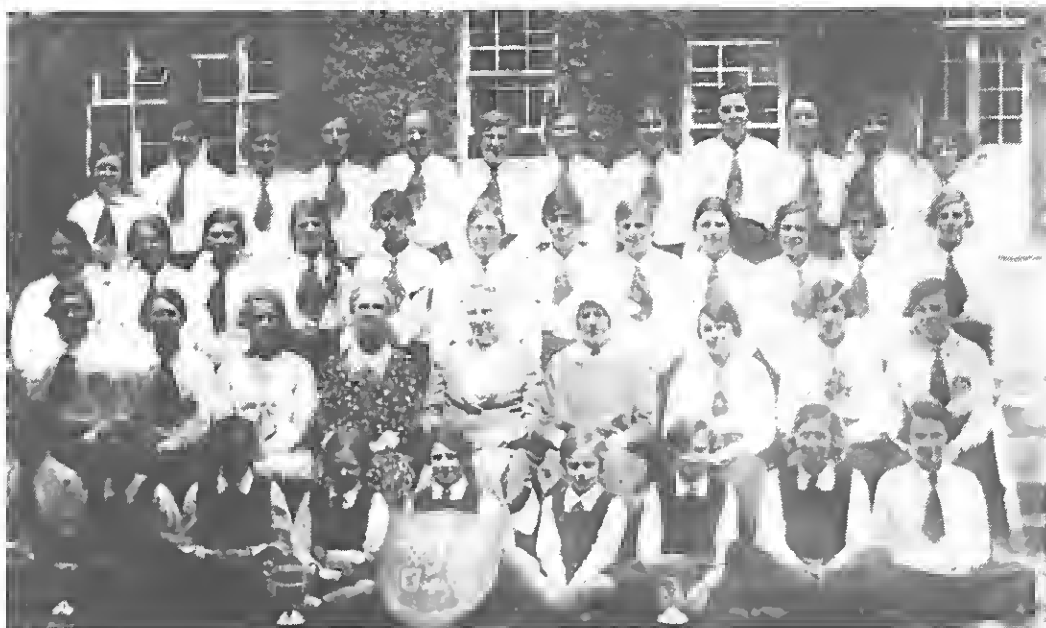
In 1928 I became a pupil at the School of St. Mary & St. Anne, Abbots Bromley, a Woodard School. St. Anne's is one of the oldest girls public boarding schools in the country and was founded in 1874. Nathaniel Woodard had little enthusiasm for the education of girls; it was for the fathers of the future that he thought it vital that they received a good education. But it was his faithful friend Provost Lowe who saw the need for a good education for girls as well as for boys.

St. Mary's was opened in 1880 and was on the opposite side of the village street. However, in 1921, the amalgamation with St. Anne's took place.

Miss Rice was the Headmistress from 1900 - 1931. Her face was kind and one could say, 'Spiritual'. Miss Veitch was her deputy and they both cared deeply for us girls in their charge.

I think we did live a very highly organised life. I remember that our days were timed to the last five minutes - rising bell, the prayer bell, first and second gongs, breakfast, bed-making, prayers in Victoria (the School Hall). Then teaching periods began. The days all continued at the same speed - three lessons, break, two lessons, back to our houses for dinner, silent reading, games, tea, back into school for more lessons or to do 'prep', then supper and so to bed - there was simply no time for idleness and no room for choice.

The School Chapel was and still is the most beautiful one that I have ever been in with its five red Sanctuary Lamps hanging near the Altar.



MEYNELL HOUSE, SCHOOL OF ST. MARY AND ST. ANNE 1930

BACK ROW

Molly Ellis Betty Coleridge-Smith - Barbara Cooper  
 Barbara Purvis Chris Routledge - Margaret Bevan  
 Rosemary Farmer Joan Brighthouse Rosemary Addison  
 Naomi Holmes

3rd ROW (STANDING)

Elsbeth Milburn Sylvia Levers Nora Fark - Mary Newton  
 Mary Hill - Marjorie Malpass Mary B. Hill Janett Witney  
 Lois Darbarn Muriel James

2nd ROW (SITTING)

Bunty Allen May Farquhar Miss Wickham Miss Baker  
 (House Mistress of Meynell) Miss M.A. Rice (Headmistress)  
 Miss Timewell (Matron) Betty Dodds (Head Girl)  
 Muriel Pitt Joan Dodds

1st ROW (SITTING ON THE LAWN)

Bluebell James Trixie Gardiner Mary Dale Monica Iden-Hart  
 Christine Dale Anne Brighthouse Christine Addison  
 Mary Brighthouse Nancy Gardiner

Three Games Cups

Typical Order of Services for the week:

Monday, 8.30	Matins in the Chapel or Prayers in 'Vicy'
Monday, 6 p.m.	Evensong in the Chapel or Prayers in 'Vicy'
Tuesday, 8.30	Matins or Prayers in Vicy
Wednesday, 8.30	Matins in the Chapel or Prayers in 'Vicy'
Thursday, 8.30	Matins or Prayers
Friday, 8.30	Matins or Prayers
Saturday, 8.30	Matins in the Chapel or Prayers
Saturday, 7.30 p.m.	Compline in the Chapel

From Monday to Saturday at 7.15 a.m. Mass was held in the Chapel (voluntary).

From Monday evening to Friday - Evensong at 6 p.m.

Sunday, 8 a.m. Mass in the Chapel, or  
Sunday, 11 a.m. Choral Eucharist in the Chapel  
Sunday Evensong at 6 p.m.

I remember life when Father Gunning was Chaplain and how calm and placid he was; his Divinity lessons were quiet, leisurely affairs. Father Gunning was a keen bee-keeper and any mention in the scriptures of anything relating to bees or honey would plunge him into raptures. A quicker way to terminate the lesson was to cry, 'Father, your bees are swarming', and away he went.

Our uniform in those far off days was a navy blue serge costume with a white silk blouse in summer; a red tie, and a straw boater with a red band with the lily and the dove embroidered on the band.

For Mattins we wore our straw hats or 'boards', as we used to call them. For Mass and Evensong we wore white Nun-like hoods, which we pinned under our chins. We had white suits for Sundays and pinafores.

Our daily headgear consisted of wholly unique and unspeakable 'Paddy Hats' which were undecorated pudding basins of soft felt. In the summer, white linen hats for games as no rain, hail or shine was allowed on our delicate heads.

We were allowed 4 ozs. of sweets a week, on Saturdays.

On Saturday mornings we had to sit and darn our black stockings, or do other repairs, then we were free to eat our sweet ration, doled out by a House Prefect from the locked sweet cupboard kept on the landing.

On my first day at School I was nervous and rather shy, but Buntty Allen, a Prefect in Maynell House, took care of me for those first few days. She was so friendly, very good at games; in fact, she was good at everything. Betty Downes who I had known at the High School also went to Abbots Bromley at the same time. I soon became friendly with Audrey Cliffe, a farmer's daughter from Kings Bromley and we still keep in touch. Then there were the three Brighthouse girls, Mary, Anne and Jane and they were all good at games.

One of the Sisters at the School Sanatorium had been a House Matron at Harrow School. She talked often about her darling Harrow boys. I don't think she really liked girls very much so to please her we used to sing part of the Harrow School song. It went like this -

'Forty years on when afar and asunder  
Parted are those who are singing today'

The VI Form were nearly all girls of 18 or 19 years old. Mary Huck, who was head girl of Coleridge House, was 22 years old when she left. These girls, on reaching the VI Form Grade, were each presented with a 'mortar-board' from which hung a red tassel and placed on their heads by Miss Rice. It was quite a ceremony, taking place in Victoria at the beginning of each academic year. If any of these girls had long hair, it was now time to do it up in a bun.

I was Confirmed at St. Peter's Church, Edgmond by the Bishop of Stafford, the Rt. Rev. Lionel Payne Crawford in the summer of 1930.

Rogation Day processions loomed large in the early summer. We would make our way to various outside parts of the School and down the village street to Crofts to bless the rhubarb. There were damsons too in the autumn term. We certainly had plenty of rhubarb - almost every day for pudding during the summer term.

It was nearly the end of the Christmas term. Miss Rice sent for me; she talked to me kindly and we said goodbye, for I was to leave the next day. She gave me a book and her blessing.

In the Chapel at Evensong that night I was with several other girls who were leaving also, admitted to the Old Girls Guild by the Chaplain who blessed us and hung a small bronze medallion round our necks. He also gave me a small prayer book. On the medallion was the School badge, showing the lily and the dove intertwined.



*Maria Rice May 1930*

In the early Spring of 1931 I became a student at the College of Agriculture at Rodbaston, near Penkridge, along with 27 other girls who were mostly farmers' daughters. Two of the girls had been with me at Abbots Bromley, one in the same house as myself, Meynell. Instructions were given in dairy farming, butter and cheese making, poultry keeping, domestic science and horticulture and bees. We students were divided into four groups. For a week it would be dairy farming, another group would assemble in the dairy under the keen eye of Miss Noble while another group would go down to the poultry unit with Mr. Shelley and Mr. Scott while the fourth group would make their way to the Domestic Science kitchen across the yard where Miss Turner would be waiting for us. She was ample in figure and always smiling.

We had to be up and dressed by 6.30 a.m., drink a quick cup of tea in the front hall and dash to our various units.

Those girls on cheese making would go to the dairy, where the milk was put into large vats, gentle heat was then applied by steam pipes. The starter was then added and the rennet. It was then left while we had breakfast, which was always excellent. On returning to the dairy the milk was in curd form. It was then cut with a large knife and broken into a fine curd by hand; the whey was drained away and the curd lifted out of the vat and put onto large squares of muslin. The whole lot was then placed into cheese mounds that had holes in the base for drainage. After several days the muslins were changed and pressure was applied by a cheese press.

The girls learning the art of hand milking were supervised by the Farm Bailiff of the day. When milking was over they also returned to the Hall for breakfast and afterwards went to the dairy to churn the cream into that wonderful butter that we used to have for tea.



### STAFFORDSHIRE COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE 1931

#### BACK ROW

- Betty Downes Eunice Edwards Nora Horne  
Edith Meakin Sheila Phisackerlea Betty Shelley  
Edith Pyatt

#### 3rd ROW

Elsie Woodward Doris Carter Marjorie Pointon  
Irene Clowes Elsie Brandon Marjorie Hollins  
Audrey Cliffe May Knobbs - Pamela Childs

#### 2nd ROW

Doris Parry Nora Boulton - Marjorie Malpass  
Jeanne Robson Mary Newton Molly Wells Nora Robinson  
- -

#### 1st ROW

Miss Turner Mr. Craig Miss Wilkinson Mr. Tilley  
(Vice Principal) Mr. Rushton (Principal) Miss Noble  
Mr. Jeffery Mr. Shelley Mrs. Shaw

The students learning domestic science went to their kitchen across the courtyard. The first job was to clear the ashes out of the 'range', clean it and light a fire so that we would have a hot oven when we returned from breakfast.

The first things that Miss Turner taught us to make were short crust pastry, steamed fruit puddings, spotted dick, rock cakes and consomme.

The poultry students were at first guided personally by one of the Instructors. First, the newly hatched chicks had to be checked, given mash and fresh clean water and especially to check the lamp that was providing them with heat.

The laying birds were then fed with mash in their hoppers and given fresh water. Nearly all laying hens in those days were on free-range; the Deep Litter idea came into vogue later.

After breakfast we returned to the poultry houses to clean them out, replacing the litter with straw or peat moss. We were taught how to pluck, draw and truss a chicken or hen. We were also taught how to kill one.

At about mid-day we would return for lunch. Mr. Jeffery used to say the Grace and then he would carve the joint. Sometimes we would have roast chicken or boiling fowl, in which case there had to be several birds - together with the staff there were at least 40 of us waiting to be served.

In the afternoons we had lectures which included horticulture and bee keeping.

Tea was served at 4 o'clock consisting of bread and butter and jam and a lovely Dundee Cake - home made, of course - one on each of the three tables.

Then it was time for milking; time to turn the cheese, time to feed the poultry and to collect the eggs, time to prepare the kitchen for the next day's cookery class.

After supper at 6.30 the time was our own. If fine we played tennis or cricket; if wet we usually danced in the Common Room.

We attended Divine Service each Sunday morning at either Penkridge or Gailey Church.

For practical work we wore mauve cotton dresses with a white collar and elbow cuffs, a white dairy maid's cap and apron.

For poultry, horticulture and bee keeping we wore brown drill smocks over our dresses. The white cap and apron were worn only for domestic science and butter and cheese making.

An important annual event was the Pig Sale, usually held in early May. A London firm of Auctioneers by the name of H. Hobson & Son would come to sell a selected number of pedigree Large White pigs, which Rodbaston was famous for. These pigs had been fed on the whey from the dairy which was conveyed by a pipe partly underground; it went past the Apiary and finally flowed into a very large tank at the Pig Unit. The pig meal was then added and mixed well and then fed to the pigs.

Also in May a Rook Shoot took place. One morning we found a pile of these young birds by the kitchen door so, under Miss Turner's supervision, we had to skin them. Such a messy job. We only used the breasts and legs. These were washed, dried and floured and made into rook pies; they were topped with a lid of flaky pastry. These pies were served at lunch and they tasted very good.

Under Miss Turner's guiding hand we had been taught how to make most things from Bechamel sauce to curing a tongue, jugging a hare, boning a fowl for a galantine to rook pie and a Wedding Cake. It was a pleasure to receive instructions from her and we all felt a little sad when we said goodbye. It was now nearly the end of the summer term and our happy time at Rodbaston was almost over.

The last full day dawned and that night we students were given our end of term Supper and Dance, which we all enjoyed. The next day we packed our trunks, thanked the College staff and said a somewhat tearful goodbye to each other and so left Rodbaston. I'm sure each one of us went home a stone heavier in weight for we had certainly 'lived in clover'.

So I arrived home once more, me and my trunk, but this time my school and student days were over.

Mr. Rushton was the College Principal.

Mr. Tilley was Vice-Principal.

Miss Noble was in charge of Butter and Cheese Making.

Mr. Thompson was the Senior Poultry Lecturer.

Mr. Jeffery was Dairy Farming Lecturer.

Mr. Craig lectured in General Farming.

Mr. Shelley was also a Poultry Lecturer.

Miss Turner was in charge of the Domestic Science unit.

Miss Wilkinson was the Matron.

Mr. Dempster was the Horticulture Lecturer.

Mr. Price taught us how to keep and handle Bees.



Marjorie Knight with the W.I. Cup she won in 1982 for making the best pot of raspberry jam that year.



Walton Bury



The Hon. Mrs. Allsopp of Walton Bury

Miss Allsopp was one of the founder members of the W.I. Born in 1895 in the reign of Queen Victoria, she saw six monarchs on the throne. In her long life she saw great changes and much progress, from the days of the horse-drawn carriage to the jet age.

She was the only daughter of the late Captain, The Hon. H.T. and Mrs. Allsopp. Her Father, an officer in the Hussars, was the 5th son of the 1st Baron Hindlip of Hindlip Hall, Worcester, while her Mother was a Miss Okeover of Okeover Hall, Ashbourne, one of a family of seven.

Her parents settled in Staffordshire and so from babyhood until April 1973 Miss Allsopp lived at Walton Bury, the home she loved so much. Throughout her life her activities proved her involvement with the community in varied ways.

On the death of her Mother in 1935 she, in turn, became Secretary of the Hospital Ladies' Linen League, a worthy cause before the Health Service was established.

In 1939 came the Second World War and once more she generously made her home available to accommodate a Red Cross Post. On about three evenings a week several Walton residents gathered there for lectures, First Aid courses and splint and bandage practice. In the summer months lectures were held in the stable, while in the winter she welcomed us in the big dining room.

During these war years too, Miss Allsopp spent many busy afternoons at a local centre packing parcels for Prisoners of War.

In the years that followed the war she witnessed many changes in the locality, but sadly in January 1970 her housekeeper and companion, Miss Fanny Hemmings, who had lived with her for 64 years, died and life without her became very difficult. She died in the Sister Dora Nursing Home on 15 May 1974.



The Parish Room on the left.  
The Dawsons lived in the cottage next door.



Mrs. A. Buchanan and Marjorie Knight receiving Certificates  
for over 30 years service to the W.I. from the W.I.  
President, Mrs. C. Connolly, 1985.

In the early years of the W.I. in Walton, Handicraft Classes were held in the Parish Room and were well attended.

One such Class was glove-making, using rabbit skins. The rabbit had to be caught in a 'noose', not shot, for the pelt had to be perfect for curing. This was a job to do in the cold winter months, for then the animal had its winter coat on. First it was skinned, then it was carefully stretched out, the fur side down, and nailed on to a board and scraped thoroughly so as to remove all the fat. This was done for two or three days with a blunt knife. Next, salt and saltpetre was well rubbed into the pelt and repeated for several days. Then it was left in a cool, airy place to absorb the salt for about a month and to dry out. Then any remaining salt was removed and, while still on the board, a little Olive Oil was gently rubbed into the now cured skin. This was repeated for several days. Finally the nails were removed and the skin was lifted off the board and rubbed very gently between the hands so making it pliable.

There then followed the tricky part of laying the pattern on the cured side of the pelt, taking care that you had a right and left hand glove. They were lined with a soft material and the palm was usually knitted. Then came the joy of sewing, and so a Bag Glove with a thumb was finished.

My Aunt gave me a pair of black and white rabbit Bag Gloves which she had made. Mrs. Dawson, who lived next to the Parish Room, was said to be the star of the class for she was good at everything to do with handicraft.

Another familiar figure in village life was the District Nurse. In the early 1920's it was Mrs. Causer and she rode a bicycle to do her calls.

She was followed in about 1932 by Nurse Smith, who lived in the first cottage near the Home Farm. She too rode a bicycle, but later on during her stay with us she had a small car. She was a striking figure in her navy blue coat over her nurse's uniform and she always wore a small round navy uniform hat; in fact, I never ever remember seeing her without it. She was good at her work and she was very kind. Sometimes her's was a day and night job, in all kinds of weather. If she was worried or anxious or 'put out', she would lapse into a Birmingham accent, which was where she lived as a girl. I do often wonder how she managed to reach her patients who lived on Stockton Common, for it was often wet and muddy and only a cart track; or how she made her visits to the Brancote Cottages near the river.

After the War, Nurse Smith moved to a house almost facing the Sister Dora Nursing Home. A few years later she moved again to one of the Shugborough Lodges, the one on the left-hand side, which pleased her very much. I think she retired about 1965 after more than 30 years of dedicated and faithful service.

She died alone in her home at New Year 1969, with no-one to hold her hand or say a last Goodbye - she who had nursed and comforted so many people in life and in death.



W.I. SUMMER MEETING at WALTON BURY 1922

Back row: - Hon.Mrs. Allsopp Miss Tagg -  
Miss Brace's Housekeeper - -

Front row: Miss J. Alderson - - - Mrs. Longson  
Miss Allsopp Mrs. Pointon  
Mrs. Fradley - Mrs. Causer Mrs. Parsons

Something I remember hearing about from the 1920's was the occasion of the 'Rent Day'. Farm rents were paid at half yearly intervals - Lady Day and Michaelmas. The local farmers would go to the Estate Office at Milford, pay their rent, and in those early days were treated to a lunch at the Barley Mow. After a while this custom came to an end.

One of my Uncles used to repeat this old saying to me:

"Death and the Rent Day always come  
But I hope I am better prepared for death  
Than I was for the Rent Day this morning."

I remember Mrs. Mason, a widow who lived in a cottage next door to Jinny Alderson at Milford. Mrs. Mason was tall and stood very upright. She had a very kind heart. Nearly always when I saw her she would be wearing a black dress, fairly long, and a good sized apron. In the summer months she would make cups of tea, or even supply just hot water. She would also store bicycles in her garden for a small charge to add a little extra to her meagre pension. Her customers were the visitors who came to the Fair at Milford, for in those days it was held about four times a year. Then, of course, there were the usual Saturday and Sunday visitors in the summer months.

Mrs. Mason had high regard for my Grandfather who lived at Stockton Farm. If she was worried in any way she would walk up to seek his advice. One such time, the owner of her cottage wished her to leave - I believe eviction was mentioned. So my Grandfather took her to see a Solicitor in another town to seek legal advice and to see what Mrs. Mason's position was. The outcome was a happy one for Mrs. Mason was able to stay. I am almost sure that Grandfather would pay the legal fees. He died on 28 November 1938.

Mrs. Mason walked to Baswich Church with her flowers to attend the funeral service and afterwards she walked back to her home at Milford. To this day it troubles me that none of us thought to offer her a lift in one of the funeral cars on that December day.



W.I. SUMMER MEETING at WALTON BURY 1927

Back row: Mrs. Ashcroft Mrs. Hassler Mrs. Clements  
Mrs. Caulcott Miss Harris - Mrs. Fradley - -  
Mrs. Cotton - - - -

3rd row: - - Mrs. Parsons Mrs. Shaw Mrs. Hollander  
Mrs. Ewart - Mrs. Moore Mrs. Allcorn - Mrs. Lewis  
- Miss Ashton Mrs. Hamnet Miss Blakeman Mrs. Caudwell

2nd ROW

Mrs. Edwards Mrs. Causer - Miss Ball Mrs. Dodd  
Hon. Mrs. Allsop Miss Birks Mrs. Cook Mrs. Levett - -  
Mrs. R. Blakeman Miss Tagg Mrs. Pointon -  
Mrs. S. Woods Mrs. Harrison Mrs. Mountford

SITTING:

1st row: Mrs. Edwards Mrs. W. Woods Miss Dodd Mrs. Dawson  
Miss Northwood Miss Parsons Mrs. Marden Miss Edwards  
Mrs. Malpass Miss Allsopp Mrs. Wray - - - -

In those early days between 1920 and 1930 the annual Village Fete was usually held in August at the home of Miss Brace or Milford Hall - anywhere where there was a nice large garden. A local farmer would usually donate a pig of, say, 10 weeks old. The competition was to 'Bowl for the Pig'. My Aunt who was then about 20 years old, won the competition one year. The pig was brought home to Stockton Farm, she fed it herself until it was time for it to go to the Market. With the money that her pig made she bought herself a watch.

At these Fetes my Mother used to enjoy helping to run the farmers' stall along with her friend, Miss Davies from Barnfields.

My Mother used to spend days baking fruit cakes, currant bread and she also took dressed poultry, rabbits and all kinds of jams and pickles.

Miss Davies used to arrive in a taxi, laden with all kinds of farm produce and those super Dundee Cakes with lots of almonds on the top and her special jars of lemon cheese.

Mrs. Ward from Weeping Cross House was a kind and generous buyer. In fact, she bought so much from the various stalls that she often had to have a taxi to take her home.

Another generous buyer was Mr. Nuttall of Brookside, Milford. He would make his way to each stall, buy something priced at about 3/6d. and leave a £1 note each time.

A familiar figure at the Village Fete was Mrs. Platt of Brocton Lodge. Most of the year she spent at her home, Erskine Lodge, Stornaway on the Isle of Lewis, but she always came to Brocton for the summer months. She was a well-built lady who usually dressed in a fairly long grey tweed skirt and jacket. She had a lovely head of grey hair swept up and done into something like a large doughnut, on the top of which was firmly planted a grey hat secured with a hat pin.

She was kind and generous and I admired her greatly from a distance. While on Lewis, Mrs. Platt was a good and keen shot. She would donate a deer-skin rug to our local Fete for a raffle - she had shot the deer herself.

Mr. Salmon was her coachman and he too wore a grey livery suit and a grey bowler. His daughter, Elsie, married Frank Blackman from Brocton. Mr. Salmon was often seen driving around the area in a high dog-cart in those days, but when driving Mrs. Platt he would take her in the Brougham, a one horse closed carriage on either two or four wheels, or the Phaeton, an open pleasure carriage on four wheels.

Mrs. Platt's nephew is the present Lord Thorneycroft who, as Peter Thornycroft, was the Conservative Member of Parliament for Stafford in the mid-1930's until 1945.

Mrs. Platt always bought as many strong aprons as she could for, as she put it, they were for her 'fisher girls' in Stornaway; so the apron stall at the Fete was prepared. Mrs. Platt died in 1935.

I went to the furniture sale and bid for the very first time and bought her copper warming pan. When I look at it now it reminds me of a kind and gracious lady.

The Hon. Mrs. Allsopp died in the September of the same year, 1935. We lived opposite her back entrance and as a child she had shown me great kindness and was interested in my welfare. She taught me how to arrange the flowers in Church.

It was in the summer of 1931 that, unknown to any of us, my  $3\frac{1}{2}$  year old cousin decided to find her way home, which was at least three miles away. She had crossed the road from Stockton, walked up Walton Bank, through the Village and was going down the fields towards Jacob's Ladder. At the same time Mrs. Allsopp was out walking in the same direction. She was more than surprised to find so small a girl on her own in such a lonely place.

The little girl took Mrs. Allsopp's hand and together they walked back to Walton Farm. On seeing my Father, Mrs. Allsopp asked him if he knew who the little girl was. "Of course I do. She is my niece" he replied. So with many thanks to Mrs. Allsopp what could have been a tragedy ended happily on that summer afternoon.

Miss Birks, who lived with her Mother on the Milford Road, was an active member of the W.I. She had held office as President and but for her persistent persuasion I don't think that the Village Hall at Walton would ever have been built. She held Sewing Parties at her home and provided us with super afternoon teas and was interested in all aspects of village life. Mrs. Birks and Miss Birks both lived until their mid-nineties.

Miss Ruth Blakeman was another founder member of the W.I. She too had been President. She and her sister Mary and Mrs. Hamnett walked from Brocton to Walton to the meetings, in all weathers. It was Miss Blakeman who helped make and embroider the very first curtain for the stage at the Village Hall.

I remember Miss Tagg, who was always rushing about from Church to School. She was kind and helpful and had a finger in every pie. I'm sure she knew if we "swopped hassocks" in Church. She was a Tory and attended their meetings when she was almost blind.

Mrs. Pointon was another well known figure; she nearly always wore black, a fairly large hat and Russian boots which she said prevented her from having rheumatism. She lived by Walton School and had a lovely garden to which she devoted much of her time. She had a son and two daughters, Janet and Marjorie, affectionately known by the young men of the day as 'Midge'. Mrs. Pointon rose early, lit her fire and calmly did her daily jobs. She died at the age of 98. At her funeral service we sang her favourite hymn, "All things bright and beautiful".

Mrs. Pointon's grand-daughter Doreen was married to a Dutch Officer on 21 February 1942, just 50 years ago.

The Village Hall at Walton was built in 1931. The Foundation Stone was laid by Mrs. Haszard's eldest son. Before that, village functions were held in the 'Hut' at Milford, Walton School or the Parish Room. The Hut had been bought from the Camp on the Chase and erected behind the Barley Mow. The Hut was used for dances quite often.

Mr. Hamnett had a small butchers shop at Milford. It faced the fairground. He was a familiar figure and would often be seen delivering meat, which he placed in a very large basket on the front of his bicycle.

Farmers in the 1920's wore breeches and leggings and boots, a jacket, a cap and a smock for work. When they went to the Auction or to farm sales, they would wear the same attire only it was newer. The smock they left at home.

Wellington Boots were not available until the late 1920's. In the early thirties the style changed and became more casual. They would wear a Harris tweed jacket, grey flannel trousers and a pork-pie hat. But for Church they wore a more formal lounge suit. For the ladies at that time the dresses were worn just below the knee, with long waists reaching to the hips - in fact they were straight up and down and rather shapeless in style. They always wore hats, pulled well down on their heads and carried small purses and wore gloves.

In the thirties it was thought to be good taste to have a tweed costume made by a man tailor. With it one would wear a cashmere sweater or a shirt blouse, a riding hat made by a milliner from a hood of soft felt and flat walking shoes. This outfit would take you almost anywhere - from Church or shopping, visiting or to the Point-to-Point Races.

In about 1935 the four Miss Joyces left their childhood home in Rowley Park and went to live at Brocton Gate, a rather lovely period farmhouse approached by the 'Old Camp Road' on the edge of Cannock Chase.

After the War they bought Stockton Croft on the corner of Stockton Lane and Weeping cross. It was after that move they became friends and neighbours of my Father and Mother. Mabel was the eldest of the four sisters; she was tall, slender and very alert. Until quite recently Stockton Croft was the home and surgery of Dr. Raby.

Gertrude was slightly more stoutly built. She was the Matron at Baswich House Preparatory School in the 1920's. She also worked at the town's Citizens Advice Bureau for a number of years.

Maud was tall like her sister Mabel and was a keen walker. Louise was the youngest; it was she who drove the car and was Captain of the local group of Girl Guides.

These four sisters were known affectionately as the "Joyce Girls" even though at that time they would be between 60 and 70 years of age. They had strong ideas - for instance, they went into their summer clothes on a certain date on the calendar, not by the state of the weather.

Mabel and Gertrude attended Sunday morning Service at Baswich Church, while Maud and Louise went to St. Chad's in Stafford.

The Joyce Girls were great walkers, great gardeners and great talkers. After a light afternoon tea the sisters would each go their separate ways and call on local friends to collect the latest news, so when they sat down to supper they were able to 'swop' the news that they had heard on their visits. Mabel was the sister who always called on my Mother for the chat that they both enjoyed.

In the evenings they almost always played 'Scrabble', for they said it kept their minds alert.

In about 1960 the Joyce Girls sold Stockton Croft; Mabel and Gertrude bought a smaller house in Newquay Avenue and Maud and Louise bought a house nearby where they lived for about 10 years. From there Mabel and Gertrude went to live in Wilford House, while Maud and Louise settled in the Convent. Maud and Louise both died in the early 1970's. Mabel died about two years later. She had her evening meal and played 'Scrabble' on that last evening with her sister and by the following morning she had passed to the Promised Land. But Gertrude lived to be 100 years old and received a telegram from the Queen in October 1979.

Miss Joyce left six nieces and nephews, five great-nieces and nephews and six great, great nieces and nephews.



Marjorie Knight, the late Mrs. Biddulph, with Mrs. S. Bulley, President of the W.I. cutting the anniversary cake on the Branch's Platinum (70th) Anniversary 1989

It was a custom in the past to have a Billy Goat running with the herd, for it was supposed to keep the cows healthy. Maybe it was just another 'Old Wife's Tale'. However, my Father bought a young Kid and so this lovely little male goat arrived at the farm and was put into a small loose-box with some calves, who were terrified at so strange an intruder. After a few days the calves and the goat settled down quite happily, feeding together from the same trough. We really became quite fond of Jacko, as we called him, and he was admired by our neighbours, who liked to pat and stroke him, and then wondered why their gloves were rather smelly! The odour from a Billy Goat is very strong and lasting. Jacko was black and white in colour and at a year old was fully grown and was not quite so attractive. He spent his days in the fields with the cows, but when they were brought in for morning and afternoon milking he came with them. That is when he became rather mischievous.

We would find him in the barn eating any kind of cow food, be it bran, oats or cow-cake etc. - even washing on the line. Imagine my surprise to see him edging his way on his side through the 'pop-hole' of a poultry house, for he had discovered the hens' mash and was eating it. This 'hole' was only about 10 inches in height and width and only intended for a hen to go through..

Jacko, like hand-reared lambs, would follow you whenever he saw you. One Sunday morning I was in a hurry to get to Church for the 8 a.m. Service. It wasn't until the Service began and we were making our responses to the Ten Commandments (for in those days we used the much loved 1662 Book of Common Prayer) when, to my horror, I heard a 'bae' from outside the Church. Jacko had followed me and I was unaware of his presence until that moment. I looked at Miss Tagg, who smiled, for she guessed who I then knew was outside. I thought he might be in the porch, and if anyone should open the door, suppose he came inside; I was filled with panic.

The Service ended and I made a dash for the door and set off at high speed with that mischievous goat.

After that episode I made sure that Jacko was safely shut in his loose-box whenever I went down the lane.



Lady Draughtsman as a 4 month old foal with Walton Farm groom, J. Solom, 1921.

The farms then were far less mechanised than they are today and, of course, we always had good horses. My Father bred Shires; he was very fond of them and they were his hobby. He did a great deal of showing in London, Peterborough, Newark, Ashbourne and Brewood and all the local shows. He used to spend the evenings grooming and preparing the horses, sometimes starting as early as 3 o'clock in the morning. If the show was to be some distance away they would go by train on the previous day.

Heleigh Bonnie was the first mare that I remember. She was the mother of Heleigh Dora, who on 21 April 1921 produced a lovely filly foal who was called Lady Draughtsman. She won 1st prize in her class seven years running at Brewood Show. As a mare she won 2nd prize in London in 1925 and many other Shows such as Ashbourne, Peterborough and the Staffordshire County Show. This mare only produced three foals. One was Heleigh Lady, foaled in 1927. She also had a colt foal who was registered as Heleigh Royal. My Father sold him when he was 3 years old and he went to Ireland as a stallion.

The Shire Horse Society was held at the Agricultural Hall, Islington, each February and lasted for 4 days. The journey was made mostly by train, with special boxes provided for horses. One, of course, had to book accommodation. The train would leave Preston or Crewe and stop at the required stations. It would leave early on the Monday morning of the Show Week and it took all day to arrive in London, where the horses were taken off the train at Maiden Lane and then they were led the short distance to Islington. The classes were judged on the following two days; Thursday was Sale Day and on the Friday they made the journey home.

In the 1928 Stud Book the Shire Horse Society had 4,800 members. The idea was to endeavour to improve the Old English Breed of Cart Horses and to promote the distribution of sound and healthy Sires throughout the Country.

In 1929 my Father had a mare named Boro Jewell; then another rather special Shire mare called Lynhurst Dorothy. She was sold in 1931, making the highest price at the Peterborough sales. I think my Father only once came home without a prize.

The Shire horse was, as a rule, only used for breeding. It was a bigger animal than the working cart horse. Stallions were on average about 18 hands (a hand is 4 inches), Mares from 16 - 17 hands in height and they had a lot of hair on their legs; the more the better and it was known as the feather. Shires also had large feet and when shod the horse-shoe would measure 9 - 10 inches across in the widest part.

The Breeder had to prepare weeks and months ahead when showing. The horses had to be brushed down thoroughly every day, given the best hay, green food or dry, as the case may be. A few days before a Show the horses had to be shod with special shoes at the Smithy. On their return each foot was put into a low tub of hot water and soap flakes (Mother's best Lux) and washed thoroughly, then dried with a cloth and finally finished off with wood flour. This made the leg hair beautifully clean. The mare was then combed and brushed and plaited and decorated with small ribbon rosettes on wire and so was the hair on the tail. Finally the whole body of the horse was rubbed down with a soft cloth until it shone.

These splendid animals walked with such bounce and were and still are seen at Shows in Brewers' Drays or Gears, or In Hand.

The cart horse was the usual type of work horse used on the farms. It used to be said that one of the pleasantest sights was to see a skilful ploughman managing a pair of well-trained horses ploughing in the field.

At 7 a.m. the horses would be fed with a mixture of chopped hay, or straw, bran and crushed oats; this was slightly damped and called 'Chop'. There was always hay in the rack above the manger. There was a horse trough by the stable from which the horses drank. About 8.30 a.m. the horses would have their harness put on by the Waggoner and were taken out to do a morning's work.



Group taken at Down Memory Lane Morning, June 1991

BACK ROW: Ann Moore William Dawson Ben Bates  
Ann Bates (nee Northwood)

FRONT STANDING: Albert Fradley Mrs Mary Lloyd (nee Lewis)  
Marjorie Knight (nee Malpass) Laura Husselbee (nee Dutton)  
Ethel Best Ann Lewis

FRONT SEATED: Sarah Emery and Angela Gibbons (holding  
Mrs. Knight's spice box)

At 12 noon they would return, have a short drink of water, go into the stable where they were given another meal of 'Chop' in the manger. At 1 p.m. they were taken back to the ploughing or whatever work they were doing.

At 5 p.m. the Waggoner would return with his team, only allowing the horses a short drink, especially if they were sweating. Whilst they were eating their Chop or hay he would brush them thoroughly and use a Curry Comb lightly so not to damage the skin, then finish off with a cloth. The work horse usually slept in the stable at night in winter and was bedded down with straw, but in summer they were turned out to grass after they had cooled down.

Micky was not a show horse but was an excellent worker and would tackle any type of work that he was put to. He was what is known as a 'half-legged horse'.

A half-legged horse is a small heavy-weight cart horse strong in the shoulder and able to trot.

Robert was a Cavalry Horse, which I rode and drove and he again would do any kind of farm work. He was rather nervous, especially when the roads had ice on them. As he grew older he would follow me when I was feeding the poultry. He was chestnut in colour and we kept him to the end. I still have two of his shoes.

Maggie was the grey pony who drew the float, a job she did for about six years. She was sold at the farm sale in 1946.

Threshing Day was an occasion, and we were pleased when it was over, for in those days the job was done by a steam engine. The Threshing Machine would arrive, drawing a large item of machinery called the 'Box', into which the bundles of oats or wheat were fed.

One man had to pitch the bundles onto the Box, where a man was ready to cut the twine and feed them into the machine. At the side of the Box were hooks on which the sacks to receive the grain were placed. The husks, or chaff, just fell in a pile and had to be continually carried away in a large sheet, while another man, perhaps two men, would be taking the sacks of threshed corn up to the Granary. Another man would be carting water for the engine, for it was steam driven. It also needed coal taking up to the rickyard, to produce the steam.

To have a required number of men we had to borrow 2 or 3 from the adjoining farms.

The driver and his 'mate' used to arrive early and we had to provide them with breakfast and a meal at mid-day. They had very large appetites indeed.

My Mother used to say that the Threshing Machine arrived without any coal, but always left with a full supply.

I was born in Tamworth and came with my parents in 1915 to live at Walton Farm. I lived there until 1970 when I went to live at Lynhurst, Weeping Cross, where my parents had moved on giving up farming. My Father died in 1961 aged 80. My Mother died in 1978 at the age of 92 and both are buried in Baswich Churchyard.



My Mother, Elizabeth Malpass (nee Edwards) on her 90th birthday, 21 June 1986, with myself and my niece, Wendy Edwards, who is a great-great-niece of Mr. & Mrs. Longson. Wendy was 4 years old at the time.